

Good afternoon.

I am so pleased to be on the campus of the University of Minnesota Duluth. It has been a few years since I've been here so this is a real treat for me to get back to Duluth and UMD.

This is a wonderful higher education institution. Under the leadership of Dr. Kathryn Martin, who in my opinion is a true academic champion, the faculty, staff and students here at UMD are contributing to an academic institution that adds strength and vitality to this community, our state and our country.

Dr. Martin, thank you for the invitation to be here today. It is a privilege to have been asked to speak and honor the legacy of Ben and Jeanne Overman. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the members of the Overman Trust Board for their work investing in this community and its citizens.

Before I get started I want to ponder a bit about the lives of Ben and Jeanne Overman. I never met Mr. and Mrs. Overman. But, having read a brief biography I wish I had. They were a couple who achieved the American dream – through hard work.

Ben and Jeanne Overman were both born into poverty. As children they struggled and they worked. They didn't work for pocket money. They worked to survive and to help their families survive.

According to his biography Ben scavenged for coal dropped from trains to help his family heat their home. Can any of us here imagine what that degree of poverty would be like?

Ben was born in Russia. His family immigrated to America, presumably to find a better life.

Ben and Jeanne both worked and they went to school. Attending school must have felt like a luxury and a great joy for children working so hard. Ninety years ago, attending school and getting an education was about taking a first step out of poverty and for immigrants, a path to becoming an American.

One can only believe that Ben and Jeanne Overman's hard work and the opportunities and abundance provided by living in this community offered a chance for a better life – and they seized that chance.

If Ben Overman was fond of saying, "the harder you work, the luckier you get," then his hard work is our good fortune. The Overman's childhood toil and struggle eventually resulted in business success and over the decades their wealth and generosity became a community treasure.

It is an honor to be here today sharing the lifetime of work, generosity, and service that Ben and Jeanne Overman bestowed upon this community and its citizens.

Something in the biography of Mr. and Mrs. Overman that intrigued me was their commitment to the Jewish tradition of "tzedakah." This tradition was described in their biography as meaning "a commandment that requires those who can afford to, must help those who are less fortunate."

Clearly the Overmans lived by this commandment and many have benefited, including us today.

I found the meaning of tzedakah very beautiful and I looked into it a bit more. The word is a combination of “righteous” or “justice” and the suffix represents the divine – a union of God and righteousness in human actions. One definition I read states, “acts of tzedakah are permeated with God’s goodness, and giving tzedakah can make the world a better place.” Righteousness, charity, justice blessed by God – giving because it is a just and joyful act that does good and pleases God. Could anything be more beautiful?

What lessons can we learn from the lives of Ben and Jeanne Overman? What can we learn from a Jewish tradition that calls for charity – not only from the wealthy – but from everyone who has something to share with another who has less?

Today, I want to talk about the world we live in and how we can have an impact on people we don’t know, but who desperately need help. I would like us to think a bit more about this idea of justice and righteousness and giving that the lives of the Overmans exemplify and apply these ideals to the more than one billion people on this planet living in extreme poverty, struggling to survive every day on \$1 or less.

These are the silent and too often invisible men, women and children whose economic status condemns them to life often defined by misery, suffering and frequently, early death. In fact every year 8 million people die because they are too poor to get the basics they need to stay alive.

Let me tell you why this issue is important to me. When I was elected to Congress in 2000 I had never had a passport and only once had I traveled outside the U.S., it was a trip to Canada. But following the events of September 2001, I knew I needed to become a student of international relations.

Over the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to travel the world and see some very difficult places – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Darfur, Ethiopia, Congo, Laos – and meet officials and ordinary citizens. What I have seen and learned has made me a strong proponent of U.S. engagement in the world for our own security, as a partner with the poor, and as a force for peace.

In Congress, I joined the International Relations Committee, and then last year was appointed to the Appropriations subcommittee which funds the State Department and our country’s foreign assistance programs. While the \$36 billion my subcommittee will spend this year for diplomacy and international assistance is a lot of money, it is in fact less than 1 ½ percent of the federal budget. By comparison, this year the federal government will spend \$260 billion just to pay the interest on our national debt.

My journey into international relations has been shaped by a war in Afghanistan which I supported, and a war in Iraq which I opposed. I have had the opportunity to meet kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers. But, the experiences that have left the biggest mark on me are the faces, words, and courage of the people I’ve met in the poorest corners of the

globe. What I have come to realize is that their future and their fate is in part in my hands, and yours.

A billion people around the world are counting on us and our country to be generous, wise, and courageous. They are looking to us to recognize the fact that their lives have value and their pursuit for human dignity is also our cause.

As Americans, we are among the most blessed and fortunate people not only living on the planet today, but in all of human history. Americans, our wealth, health, and power place us at the pinnacle of human kind. This privileged status bestows a special duty upon this nation and its citizens to work to ensure that the priorities, choices, and investments our nation makes around the world reflect not only our self-interest, but our values.

For me promoting peace, human dignity, and a commitment to ending needless human suffering are extensions of my faith and spirituality. These principles should also be reflected in our country's foreign policy because they help to build the kind of world we should all want our children to live in.

Can our faith, our values, and our tax dollars be combined into an American "tzedakah" to increase our commitment to feeding the hunger, healing the sick, educating all girls and boys, empowering the ignored and alienated, and inspiring hope in every corner of our planet?

I say yes. The concept of "tzedakah" that the Overman's so nobly lived by is a value that should also be applied to our nation's policy decisions.

The United States has a population of 300 million people with a per capita annual income of nearly \$40,000 or about \$110 per day. How do we acknowledge the disparity between wealth and misery and call it anything other than immoral?

In an integrated, \$60 TRILLION global economy is it not possible to find solutions to the needs of one sixth of the world's population that live on only \$1 per day?

These are not disposable lives. These are human beings who have value and must be valued.

The next president, the Congress and the American people, all working together, have the power to lead the global fight to eliminate extreme poverty in world, to save the lives of millions of newborn babies, to overcome the devastating human suffering caused by AIDS. We have the ability to invest in solutions that will end food insecurity, allow girls to be in schools, and make a more peaceful world.

For our country and our citizens, this is not a question of a scarcity of resources; it is a question of setting priorities and investing in a sustainable future for all our brothers and sisters on this planet.

Yes, we have poverty and needs here in the United States. We need to invest in our children and families here at home. But with the resources we have we can do so much more for our own citizens and those in profound need beyond our borders.

Earlier this month, we had a major success in the U.S. House that demonstrated what is possible when a common vision is shared and acted upon. With the support of President Bush, Democrats and Republicans came together to support investing \$50 billion over five years to partner with poor countries in their battles against AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. This legislation will build upon successful current efforts by training new health workers, putting more people on AIDS treatment, assisting children orphaned by AIDS, providing bed nets to prevent malaria, and expanding access to TB treatment to millions.

This is American leadership at its best. We should all be proud of this effort because lives will be saved and hope will be reborn among families and communities where there had been only illness and death. This global health legislation is a big step forward, but there is still more we can do to save lives and it starts with honoring our past commitments to help.

In September 2000, 189 countries, including the United States, gathered at the United Nations and adopted eight quantitative and measurable goals to be achieved by 2015. These goals, known as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals or the MDGs, focus on saving lives, promoting human dignity, and building a common, sustainable future between all nations and for all people.

The eight goals to be achieved by 2015 are to:

1. Reduce by half the one billion people currently living in extreme poverty on \$1 per day;
2. Achieve universal primary education for all children;
3. Promote gender equality;
4. Reduce by two –thirds the 10 million children who die annually before the age of five;
5. Reduce the half million annual maternal deaths by three-quarters;
6. Reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Create a global partnership for development.

These goals aim at elevating all mankind to the most basic standard of living.

Eight years have past since these Millennium Development Goals were agree to. Time is running out on whether the world community will meet these commitments. And, time is running out for the real people whose lives depend on successfully achieving the MDGs. It is my belief that the United States has the ability, the resources, and the moral obligation to work in partnership with other wealthy nations, and make the investments needed to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Can we afford the additional billions in investments? I think we can. Why is increasing funding to save lives, to tap human potential, and to enhance human dignity more controversial for Members of Congress than spending \$3 billion every week to continue the war in Iraq?

Let me ask the question another way. As Americans, can we afford the costs and consequences of living comfortably, as a billion people struggle for survival – living in misery and fear and hopelessness?

Can we stand by knowing that today, and everyday, 28,000 children die from diseases that can be prevented or treated sometimes for a few pennies? Or, that every three seconds a mother dies from a pregnancy related complication?

In our world today, as entire countries, communities and families confront extreme poverty, AIDS, conflict, and the consequences of global climate change – millions of Americans – believe the United States should be leading the free world not just as a military superpower, but also as a responsible “super-partner.”

This is why U.S. commitment to achieving the MDGs is critical to our own nation’s long-term interests. These are the investments that defeat poverty, defeat disease, and defeat despair. We have an enormous stake in preventing states from failing and helping countries emerge from conflict. Ultimately, investments that give people hope, promote economic opportunity, and create strong alliances towards peace, security, and self-sufficiency all benefit global stability and American interests.

As citizens of a nation that has been blessed with tremendous bounty, it should not be considered an act of political courage for Congress to vote to increase funding for girls’ education, to help keep mothers and newborns healthy, or to expand access to safe drinking water to prevent disease.

This is especially true now that we will be increasing our investments AIDS. It does little good to provide anti-retroviral drugs to people who don’t have food to eat. Or, as we successfully preventing children from contracting HIV from their mothers, what good have we done if they die weeks later from diarrhea because of contaminated water, or the lack of basic healthcare?

The MDGs provide the metric and the rationale for a comprehensive and integrated approach to development that, if successful, will save millions of lives and improve the quality of life for hundreds of millions more.

Last month I returned from my second trip to Afghanistan in the past year. There I have met with U.S. military officials, Afghan political leaders, local tribal leaders and other committed Afghans trying to secure and rebuild their country. Yet, as our 30,000 U.S. troops focus on the war on terrorism in Afghanistan, what cannot be forgotten is the fear and terror that confront Afghan families every day – particularly women – because of extreme poverty.

Afghan women face a one in six lifetime risk of dying during pregnancy. One in seven Afghan children will die before their fifth birthday. Reversing these terrifying statistics will require re-framing the concept of security in Afghanistan to include not only soldiers, but also training

health workers and birth attendants, expanding access to clean water, and providing basic education for girls.

If our own national security is directly linked to peace and security in a country like Afghanistan, then security will be achieved by investing in women, their children, and economic opportunities for their families – not only more soldiers, or smarter and bigger bombs.

For me what is important about the MDGs is that they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Reducing poverty and hunger means more opportunities for girls to go to school and we know that access to education for girls reduces the risk of HIV infection, delays child-bearing, and the number of births which again contributes directly to maternal health and child survival.

While each of the eight MDGs is vitally important, goal number 4, reducing by two-thirds mortality of children under five years old, is something I have taken on as a priority.

Last year, I introduced a piece of legislation called the *U.S. Commitment to Global Child Survival Act (H.R. 2266)*. This bill now has 86 congressional cosponsors and makes child survival a priority of U.S. foreign assistance.

This year nearly 10 million poor children will die in the developing world – the overwhelming majority from treatable and preventable causes – diarrhea, malnutrition, measles, tetanus, pneumonia. That's 28,000 children dying yesterday, today, and everyday from preventable causes. We live in a world of amazing advanced technology, yet newborns and young children die needlessly.

My bill calls for increased funding and a new child survival strategy targeting the poorest countries where investments can have the biggest immediate impacts. One billion dollars a year in additional spending on child survival will save at least one million newborns and toddlers – that's one million children's lives saved. We are spending that much money every three days in Iraq. And, if we want to talk about winning hearts and minds around the world, think of the impact this effort would have on a million parents whose babies are alive because the American people cared.

What is interesting about child survival is that the interventions required are low cost, but not available in poor countries, especially in slums and rural areas due in large part to poverty. I am talking about making available low cost interventions vaccinations, antibiotics, and micronutrients that can effectively save lives immediately. It costs 6 cents to treat diarrhea. It costs 12 cents to treat malaria, and 25 cents for antibiotics to treat pneumonia.

But these treatments cannot work without a basic health system and needed health workers that are also too often missing. Therefore, we need to be partners in building capacity, filling resource gaps and making the lives children and their mothers a priority.

A few years ago I was in the desperately poor Southern African nation of Malawi. In Malawi per capita income is less than \$200 per year. HIV is epidemic. Maternal and child mortality is very high because of a weak health system. Because of maternal malnutrition, many babies are born with low birth weight and die because of lack of proper care and no access to incubators.

I visited an innovative, low cost project run by Save the Children called Kangaroo Mother Care that was saving babies' lives for pennies. Nurses taught mothers to keep their low weight babies wrapped directly on their chests – skin to skin – allowing the mother's body heat to serve as the incubator. Breast feeding was initiated and after a week or two of Kangaroo Care the newborn usually put on enough weight gained enough strength to be out of the danger zone. The result – child mortality in Malawi is dropping because Kangaroo Care is being implemented across the country.

I want to say something about the single common thread that is absolutely necessary for the world to achieve the MDGs by 2015 – that thread is political commitment. Like any treaty or global protocol, the 189 countries that signed the Millennium Declaration and committed to achieving the MDGs must be held accountable. The beneficiaries of the MDGs don't have lobbyists or in many cases even any real political representation.

Rich nations, middle income nations and poor nations all have a role to play, a job to do, and a commitment to fulfill if the lives of a billion people are to improve and transition from lives of misery to lives of hope. The burden is not on the U.S. alone, it is a shared global responsibility.

Political commitment is also about each of us. Citizens of this country and every country must speak out, hold their elected leaders accountable, and contribute the energy, resources, and spirit to ensuring the MDGs can be achieved. Increased financial resources will create opportunities to save lives, but there is more. It will take the power of a dedicated people encouraging politicians to act with urgency.

The problems the MDGs are designed to address are staggering, but what must be remembered is that progress in many places in the world is being made. Over the past two decades amazing successes have been achieved that have benefited hundreds of millions of people in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. These successes demonstrate that extreme poverty and its human costs and consequences can be confronted and reduced if there is focused leadership.

In his essays and books, the philosopher Peter Singer has frequently confronted the moral juxtaposition of the Western world's wealth and extreme poverty in developing countries. On a global continuum of income most of us here today, while we may not be millionaires or billionaires, we are in fact among the most economically fortunate people on the planet. Singer tells a story to highlight the moral dilemma we face in the world.

Let me paraphrase: Imagine having just bought a beautiful, expensive pair of shoes that you really wanted, but didn't really need. You are walking by a small pond wearing your new shoes and you see a small child. The child has fallen into the pond and in danger of drowning. It's not your child. You did nothing to cause the child to fall into the pond. Do you go into the pond and save the child and ruin your shoes?

The answer for most of us is fairly obvious, we would save the child, ruin our shoes, and probably feel pretty good about ourselves as we put on an old pair of shoes. As Singer says, "anything else would be callous, indecent and wrong."

There are about 1.5 million Americans in the top one percent of income earners. Combined they account for \$350 billion of income per year. Many of us here are not in that category of wealth but we are blessed with comfortable lives and an income that allows us to buy a special pair of shoes every so often. There are a billion people at the other end of the spectrum – drowning not in a pond, but in an ocean of poverty and despair.

Last week the New York Times highlighted the rise in global food prices and how its impacting the world's poor. The World Bank estimates that global food prices have risen by 83% in the last three years. For those struggling to earn one or two dollars per day this level of inflation means hunger, or more likely, starvation. The Times story told of a “booming business” in Haiti among the poor – the selling of patties made of mud, oil and sugar. Asked why he eats the dirt pies, one destitute man said, “it makes your stomach quiet down.”

When does the commandment that Ben and Jeanne Overman lived by – tzedakah – apply in our lives or in our nation's conscience?

When people are forced to eat dirt – not to survive – but to not feel the pain from hunger, then I believe we have an obligation that goes beyond charity and it is a matter of justice and a reflection on our own moral character how we respond. Is it possible for our country and us as individuals to take our bounty and our blessings and share them selflessly – through our service, our donations, our tax dollars, or our political advocacy – to achieve the righteousness, justice and charity that we celebrate today by honoring the contributions of the Overmans?

Yes, of course it is. Each of us has the power and potential to make a contribution and add value to our community, our country, and to people living somewhere in a distant corner of the world.

I hope all of you decide to ruin that new pair of shoes ... maybe a few new pairs of shoes. Let's follow the example of Ben and Jeanne Overman and celebrate life by giving an opportunity for a better life to those in need – wherever they may live.

Thank you.